

# **The Social Roots of Prosperity**

CIS Occasional Papers 55

# The Social Roots of Prosperity

*Brigitte Berger*

THE TWELFTH ANNUAL  
JOHN BONYTHON LECTURE

ANA HOTEL  
SYDNEY

30 AUGUST 1995



1996

Published January 1996 by

The Centre for Independent Studies

Views expressed in the publications of The Centre for Independent Studies are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Centre's staff, Advisers, Trustees, Directors or officers.

National Library of Australia

Cataloguing-in-Publication Data:

Berger, Brigitte.

The social roots of prosperity

ISBN 1 86432 013 3

1. Family. 2. Middle class families. I. Centre for Independent Studies (Australia). II. Title. (Series: John Bonython lectures; 12th). (Series: CIS occasional paper; 55).

306.85

© 1996 The Centre for Independent Studies.  
Printed by Merino Lithographics, Moorooka QLD.  
Typeset in Garamond 11pt.

## Opening Remarks

Alan McGregor

*Chairman, CIS Board of Directors*

**P**remier Bob Carr and Mrs Carr, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen. On behalf of the Centre for Independent Studies, it is my great pleasure to welcome you to this, the Twelfth John Bonython Lecture.

My purpose is to make a few introductory remarks before the evening gets under way. The John Bonython Lecture was established in 1984 and named for the late John Bonython of Adelaide, first Chairman of the Centre's Board of Trustees and founding Chairman of Santos Limited. The purpose of the John Bonython Lecture is 'To examine the relationship between individuals and the economic, social and political elements that make up a free society.' Over the years, the Lecture has been presented by an extraordinary range of speakers including Nobel Laureate James Buchanan; Czech Prime Minister Václav Klaus, Peruvian novelist Mario Vargas Llosa, and last year by Rupert Murdoch.

We are very pleased that Professor Brigitte Berger has accepted our invitation to present the 1995 Lecture and I thank you all for joining us. Please now enjoy your dinner, the informal part of the evening.

## Introduction

Ric Charlton

Good evening ladies and gentlemen. The John Bonython Lecture is now a very well established intellectual event. The Lecture has given important figures from around the world in a variety of fields, including economics, politics, literature and business, the opportunity to stand back from day-to-day events and look at the longer term. Each Lecture has in a different way challenged its audience to look to the future, with all its dangers as well as opportunities.

Professor Berger's subject tonight, 'The Social Roots of Prosperity', looks to the future partly by looking to history - at the social and cultural conditions that help create the bourgeois family that, she argues, is central to our economic success. We are looking to the past, then, in order that the past can help explain the best of the present and in order to secure a better future. Good policy-making must rest on solid historical understanding.

Professor Berger's lecture contributes to a broadening of the economic debate in this country. Economists have done a good job in persuading us of the need to get economic incentives and structures right, even if governments have been a bit slow to act on their advice. But what the economists have to say is only one part of a bigger story. With the money expended on social welfare in this country, the great economic issues of today are social and moral. Societies cannot survive, much less prosper, on economic incentives alone. The values, attributes and skills acquired in the family are important in themselves, as well as being preconditions for economic success. It might appear to be an obvious point, but I wonder just how many of us here tonight have been able to reflect on this for more than a moment or two. Nobody now can afford to ignore these issues.

The need to take the economic debate beyond conventional economics is one reason the CIS established its *Taking Children Seriously* research program. This program looks at families and schools, two of the major institutions socialising our children. Professor Berger has gener-

ously agreed to join the academic advisory panel assisting the CIS with the *Taking Children Seriously* program.

It is appropriate that Professor Berger play this role in New Zealand and Australia, because she has made an important contribution to a similar debate in America. Her 1983 book, *The War Over the Family*, which she co-authored with her husband Peter L. Berger, also an eminent sociologist, is a case study in clear thinking about families. It puts a sophisticated but accessible case for the importance of the family, and is refreshingly free of the heated rhetoric that often surrounds this subject.

*The War Over the Family* is one of Professor Berger's many contributions to intellectual life in America. After migrating from Germany in 1956, she earned a doctorate in sociology from the famous New School for Social Research in New York. In addition to her work on the family, Professor Berger has written about social change, modernisation, childcare, universities, feminism and the welfare state. Her most recent book is on the culture of entrepreneurship. She taught at Wellesley College and Long Island University before moving to her current appointment as Professor of Sociology at Boston University.

The CIS is very grateful to Professor Berger for making the trip from Boston and I now invite her to address us.

## About the Author

Brigitte Berger was born in Germany in 1929. She studied at the University of Frankfurt and the University of Stuttgart, and emigrated to America in 1956. She received her PhD in Sociology from the New School for Social Research in New York in 1963.

She has been a Professor of Sociology since 1967, first at Long Island University, then at Wellesley College from 1979 to 1988, and now at Boston University. Her fields of specialisation within sociology include social change, modernisation, the sociology of childhood, and cross-cultural comparison on the role of the family in the formation of the economy and the polity.

She has co-authored several influential books with her husband Peter L. Berger, including *Sociology: A Biographical Approach* (1972), *The Homeless Mind: Modernization and Consciousness* (1973) and *The War Over the Family* (1983). She edited *Childcare and Public Policy* (1979) and most recently *The Culture of Entrepreneurship* (1991). She has also contributed numerous reviews and articles to publications including *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The American Spectator*, *Commentary*, and *The Public Interest*.



# The Social Roots of Prosperity

*Brigitte Berger*

It is a great honour to have been invited to give the 1995 John Bonython lecture dedicated to the exploration of 'the links between individuals and the economic, social and political elements that go to make up a free society'. While I shall take this charge very seriously, I shall do so in a manner decidedly different from the one you have become accustomed to. Instead of talking about how the macro-institutions of the economy, the state, the media, and so forth, affect individual life - as a distinguished succession of John Bonython lecturers has done before me - I shall talk about the role of the micro-institution of the family in the creation of prosperity and liberty. In particular I shall try to show that inner dynamics peculiar to the much maligned bourgeois or middle-class family - that is to say a family consisting of father, mother, and their children fused into a unit by its very distinctive ethos - provided the emerging democratic capitalist societies of the West with their organising principles and moral charter. And in looking towards the future, I shall submit that dynamics flowing from this type of family, rather than any industrial policy or governmental strategy, will be decisive in shaping the future of nations.

Looking at the world through the prism of the family implies a 'bottom-up' perspective of how the world works in contrast to the 'top-down' structural one customarily employed by economists and policy makers. Rather than trying to measure the effects of particular policies on the life of nations, a 'bottom-up' perspective pays attention to the social consequences flowing from the ways ordinary people behave in their everyday life, at their values and the hopes that inspire them. This approach may strike you as unfamiliar, if not odd. From early childhood on we have been conditioned to accept the view that the family is a helpless pawn of powerful forces flowing from technology, the economy, and the law. And here this stranger from America - with a German accent to boot - comes and claims the opposite to be true! Hence it will require a major effort on my part to induce you to think about these matters in different ways. But such an effort, I think, is precisely what



is called for today when ever more of those who enjoy a freedom and prosperity unknown to human history have begun to experience the modern world as problematic. Although many of us are vaguely aware of the fact that there exist linkages between our private life and the large institutional order of the society we live in, few of us realise the degree to which the two are intertwined, a degree that allows me to state – unequivocally – that public life lies at the mercy of private life. Yet we know – at least since Aristotle – that human beings are social beings who can develop their humanity only in the company of other human beings, in the families and moral communities in which they are embedded. And this timeless dictum takes me to the theme of my talk today.

### The Family and the Social Construction of Civilisations

Let me start my comments with the simple, straightforward proposition that the family is the culture-creating institution *par excellence*. All over the world, wherever one turns, today as in the past, an incontestable argument can be made that the family, and not the individual of the economist's paradigm, is the most basic building block on which all other social forms rest. The family itself is the product of the most elementary and most virulent emotions of human nature – love, hate, sex, hunger, sacrifice, punishment, loneliness, religious yearnings, and so on. It is also the basic locale in which human production and reproduction takes place, becomes routinised, habituated, and, ultimately, institutionalised. Over time, the patterns or ways in which these properties of human nature and human existence interact and reinforce each other lead to the formation of an almost inexhaustible variety of family systems, more than a thousand by the count of anthropologists, which, in turn, provide the foundations from which vastly different cultures and civilisations arise.

In other words, distinctive family patterns, shaped and activated in a complicated process by powerful forces of religion, not only provide the rock-bottom foundation for the development of corresponding political and economic structures within a given society, they also set up cultural potentials for future economic and political developments to occur. So for instance, as I shall show in some detail presently, we know today beyond the shadow of a doubt that the emergence of the capitalist market in the northwestern part of Europe was made possible by pre-

existing family-based cultural tendencies that antedated the industrial revolution by centuries, and it is in this sense that I am permitted to argue that the Western family provided the engine and the anchor for the great transformation in the 'common human pattern' that has ruled most of human history.

When one turns to the long history of China, on the other hand, we also know that the apparent immutability of its all-encompassing kinship structure prevented Chinese civilisation for long to develop those dynamics that could have led to the spontaneous formation of a modern market economy. Only today, when the stifling controls of the state have been muted and the 'sib fetters' of Chinese culture have grown thin in the overseas Chinese communities of Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore has the Chinese family been liberated to unfold an awesome entrepreneurial familism that is productive of the modern market. In fact, the 'sib fetters' once held to be an obstacle to economic modernisation, have in this case turned out to be the strength of what is called 'the Chinese road to capitalism' (Wong 1985, Redding 1990).

By the same token, it is also important to keep in mind that deeply ingrained cultural traditions can serve to subvert the family's dynamic potential. A case in point are the polygamous societies of the Sub-Saharan African continent, whose cultures are profoundly antithetical to the emergence of a genuinely modern market economy. Here, where every aspect of life is determined by factors of kinship, the family has failed to emerge as an economic unit. To be sure, in recent decades the control of traditions which since time immemorial have provided African social life with its form and content, have been considerably weakened by the migration of large numbers of people to the exploding cities of Sub-Saharan Africa. Yet, there exists little evidence to date for a large-scale formation towards a modern family system that is strong enough to withstand the dual pressures of dislocation and modernisation. Marriage in the urban centres of Africa is an extremely fragile bond, with men, women, and children forever on the move, making and remaking in a single lifetime domestic forms which logically cannot be called either a household or a family (Bascom 1968, Epstein 1969, Moodie 1994). It is one of Africa's great tragedies that it has been deprived of the social and economic resources only a dynamic familism can provide.

It goes without saying that when one makes generalisations as broad as these, one has to take great care not to assume that some civilisations are predestined to advance while others, like the just cited polygamous societies of Africa, are eternally condemned to lag behind. Under propitious circumstances, cultures do not only have the capacity to change; they actually do change. So for instance, when one looks through the prism of the family at a set of contemporary data that traces the social consequences of the mass migration of often desperately poor people to the teeming cities of Latin America – Brazil, Chile, and Peru, for instance – it does not take long to discover that traditional behaviour patterns that long subverted the emergence of a modern market economy are today fundamentally transformed in the migratory experience. Here, in the favelas and barrios of Latin American cities, at the bottom of society, unnoticed and unaided, a new manner of life is crystallising around family-centred behaviour patterns that – as David Martin in his recent *Tongues of Fire* (1990) has shown – are given shape and content by a Pentecostal religious ethos. Most recently Claudio Véliz has speculated that the ‘dome’ of Latin America’s centralist/mercantilist tradition is cracking today to give way to distinctly modern behavioural patterns (Véliz 1994). And again, a growing number of detailed studies convincingly demonstrate that at the heart of these cataclysmic changes stand changes in the structure and ethos of migrant families which provide a deep prior preparation for the great transformation to occur. By the same token, it is not difficult to argue that societies like Japan and England, just to name two, who have been ‘modern from the beginning’, could easily jeopardise the comparative cultural advantages they currently hold, if changes in the structure and ethos of their family system should occur.

### The ‘Bourgeois’ Family and the Creation of Democratic Capitalism

Let me now turn to my second major topic: the unique role of the nascent bourgeois or middle-class family in the creation of liberal democracy and capitalism in the West. The case of the bourgeois family not only illustrates in a singular way the civilisation-building, if not revolutionary, potential of a particular type of family, it also permits us to recognise the degree to which the fate of the middle-class family and the fate of modern democratic capitalism are inextricably intertwined.

For generations, philosophers and economic historians have tried to identify the factors that made for the rise of capitalist industrialism in the northwestern part of Europe in the early modern era. Some, like Adam Smith, attributed the transformation from feudalism to industrial society to the rationality flowing from the market, while others, following in the footsteps of the philosopher Georg Friedrich Hegel, attributed it to the triumph of freedom in the West flowing from an increasing rationality in human thought and cognition. Although most scholars are in agreement that the two are in some form connected, they disagree which preceded which: mind over matter or matter over mind. It was the genius of Adam Smith's argument – and our misfortune, I may add – that economists to this day have remained committed to Smith's *idée clef* that the capitalist market economy is the 'natural' way for individuals to organise and that it is the purpose of economists to understand the laws of the 'natural' system.

If viewed through the prism of the family, however, the way people behaved and continue to behave under capitalism is anything but 'natural'. For behaviour to become purposive it must be motivated: motivated to work, to delay gratification, to save, to plan, to build, to take risks, and so forth. To be sure, we may assume that human beings have always meant well by their offspring and wanted to protect them from harm. But this 'natural' desire does not necessarily lead to a life of self-denial, nor does it inspire never-ending efforts to care, to build, to accumulate capital or to restlessly search for ever new horizons. A more 'natural' attitude, I think, might be to save for a certain measure of material well-being and then say 'enough is enough' and begin to enjoy the fruits of one's labour by feasting and celebrating. It may well warm the cockles of the traditionalist's heart that, in many parts of the world, poor and rich families alike are willing to incur immense expenses in connection with elaborate wedding celebrations – some are even willing to go into hock for years to come. Such practices are surely not conducive to the amassing of capital for purposes of production! Yet such a saving of capital by large numbers of ordinary people, while perhaps negligible at the outset, is precisely what occurred in certain parts of Europe in the early modern period.

Similar arguments can be made with regard to one of Western civilisation's most glorious achievements: the emergence of liberal

democracy. An old Arab proverb, 'Me and my brother against my cousins, me and my cousins against the world', may well be reflective of the 'common human pattern' that has ruled human history for millennia. The political scientist Edward Banfield coined the term 'amoral familism' for this purpose. The continued consequences of this type of 'amoral familism', let me remind you, still are felt in many parts of the world today. A revealing case in point can be found in the intricate politics of Iraq where Saddam Hussein's Tikriti gang of family and cousins has managed to dominate the politics of that country to a degree unimaginable in the West.

To think in ways that transcend the interests of the immediate family, to act in ways that allow for the emergence of a 'civil society' capable of incorporating non-family members, regardless of their race, ethnicity, religion and social origin, into new political and economic networks, may well be an 'unnatural' from an Iraqi point-of-view. Yet the acceptance of this 'unnatural' way as the only way of conducting politics is precisely what happened in the rising capitalist societies of the West in the early modern period. If one wants to uncover the reasons that motivated people to behave in such 'unnatural' ways, I would propose, one is compelled to look at the inner dynamics typical of the rising middle class family and their revolutionary consequences.

Before putting my arguments before you, a few words about the use of the term 'bourgeois' are in order. In the literature, the term 'bourgeois' family and *a fortiori* the term 'bourgeois ethos' has frequently been used interchangeably with the terms 'Victorian family' and 'Victorian virtues', as Gertrude Himmelfarb for instance has done in her important book *The De-moralization of Society* (1994). In popular literature both terms 'bourgeois' and 'Victorian' have been replaced by the term 'middle class'. For analytical purposes I find the term 'bourgeois' preferable for a variety of reasons. It is confined neither by geography nor historical time, but is reflective of particular mind sets and practices; nor does it emphasise the economic dimension the term 'class' invariably carries. Yet to tell the story that has to be told, it is perfectly all right to use all three terms interchangeably as long as we know what we are talking about.

I would, however, insist that it is of considerable importance to liberate the term 'bourgeois' from its clichéd Marxist connotation. If one

broadens the economic aspect of the term to include its civic dimensions – as the Dutch with the term *burgerlijk* or the Germans with *buergerlich* do – more is altered than just its linguistic form. It is precisely the novel combination of distinct features typical of the inner dynamics of the nascent middle-class family that provided the emergent institutions of democratic capitalist society with their revolutionising power.

This may also be the appropriate moment to disabuse you of any impression that my comments today will turn out to be nothing but a moral sermon. In point of fact, nothing is further from my mind. To hold the middle-class family and its concomitant cherished virtues and ethos in high respect does not imply that we should today return to every idea about sexuality, gender roles or general propriety held dear by bourgeois moralists in the 19th century. In his brilliant book *The Subversive Family* (1982), Ferdinand Mount of the London *Times* fame, made a compelling case for the advantages of the 20th century liberation of the Victorian family from narrow prejudices and zealotry. While I have a number of reservations about some of Mount's bold arguments, I am in full agreement with him that a wholesale return to the Victorian age – as some of my friends on the political Right advocate – is neither possible, nor is it desirable.

To return to my argument: as pointed out earlier, a formidable body of research available today definitively documents that what has been called the 'proto-industrial' family served as the link between the feudal and the modern industrial worlds (Medick 1975). Its existence long antedated the rise of the industrial order and, if the Cambridge social demographers around Peter Laslett and Alan MacFarlane are right, it was the proto-industrial family that set the stage for industrialisation as far back as the 13th century (Laslett 1965, MacFarlane 1987). By the middle of the 19th century the structural features of the proto-industrial family household – reinforced and given meaning by what MacFarlane calls the 'enabling' force of the Protestant Ethic – had solidified into a 'new manner of life' that to this day remains constitutive of industrial capitalism writ large.

What made the proto-bourgeois family so special? Among its outstanding features three in particular deserve to be mentioned: the sanctity of private property, an inheritance system based upon primogeniture, a marriage system dependent upon individual choice, and the

requirement to establish and provide for one's own conjugal household. Taken together, these characteristics made for late marriage and responsible procreation, just as they encouraged individual responsibility, hard work, training, parsimony and the necessity to save. These habits were galvanised by new forms of work that became available in the 'putting out' cottage work system typically connected to the emergent textile industry, and the myriads of household based artisan enterprises that produced a great variety of objects for everyday use. Detailed studies show that the new ways to earn an independent living provided for the first time in history an opportunity to large numbers of individuals to marry and establish their own household. All that was needed was a good measure of self-reliance, persistence, rational planning, frugality, prudence, and the willingness to take calculated risks. Since the creation of one's own 'little world' was the desired way of life for most, and since the new patterns of behaviour and work rendered tangible results relatively quickly, proto-middle class patterns of behaviour were emulated by many. These family-engendered patterns of behaviour were to have far reaching consequences.

On the economic level family sentiments played a pivotal role in the expansion of capitalist production for they not only unleashed new productive work patterns, but they also created demands for consumer goods on a large scale.<sup>1</sup> As Neil McKendrick recently put it (1974: 152f):

Who bought the cottons, woolens, linens and silks of the burgeoning British textile industries? Who consumed the massive increases in beer production? Who bought the crockery which poured from the Staffordshire potteries? Who bought the buckles, the buttons, the pins and all the minor metal products on which Birmingham fortunes were built? Who bought the Sheffield cutlery, the books from the booming publishers, the women's journals, the children's toys, the products of the nurserymen?

On the political level, the egalitarian, individualistic and achievement oriented rules that governed the inner life of the proto-bourgeois family were externalised in the course of time to provide 19th century liberalism with its lasting political creed. Affections revolving around trust and confidence developed in the privacy of family life, providing

---

1. The widespread desire for building one's own home, incidentally, provides grist on the mills of those who argue that the market is driven just as much by factors of consumption as it is by production.

stable foundations for what we today call 'civil society' to emerge. The equality of individuals before the law, equal treatment by the state, and individual freedom, all those guiding principles of liberalism, can be shown to have their origin here. Parentage, religion, and, in subsequent times, also factors of gender and race, decreased in importance and made ultimately for the breakdown of traditional economic and political barriers. Contrary to Karl Marx's theory of class conflict that holds that capitalism would lead to the economic immiseration and political enslavement of the industrial worker, the 'proletariat', the expanding industrial capitalist system and the concomitant rise of political liberalism offered unmatched economic opportunities to the poor and set them free politically.

It cannot be emphasised enough that sentiments revolving around family and home propelled ever larger numbers of people mired in the subsistence economy to adapt to the rigours of industrial life. A new culture of domesticity spread like wildfire from one end of Victorian England to the other, engulfing even the child of the slums into its folds. As Edward Shorter (1975) put it:

Home, however, poor, was the focus of all his love and interests, a sure fortress against a hostile world. Songs about its beauties were ever on people's lips. 'Home Sweet Home' first heard in the 1870s, had become almost a national anthem by the turn of the century.

The middle class family's relationship to formal education is yet one more area of modern life that needs to be pointed to here briefly, for the two institutions - middle class family and the schools - are but two sides of the same coin. The rising bourgeois family not only inculcated the bourgeois virtues at home, it expected, indeed demanded, the schools to do the same. Until a few decades ago, these two institutions, family and school - for better and for worse - together set the standards for socialisation and education that were binding for the rest of society. The break this symbiotic relationship suffered during the turbulent history of the past 30 years only serves to bring into sharp relief the institutional crisis that engulfs Western civilisation today.

### The Western Family Today

When we now turn our attention to the situation of the family today, we are compelled to observe that recent history has not been kind to the



family that stood at the cradle of modern civilisation. Every social order, it has frequently been observed, contains within itself the seeds for its destabilisation. The seeds in question in the case of the bourgeois family flow from the radicalisation of the very characteristics that made for its distinctiveness in the first place: its rational individualism and its rational cognitive style. Under the banner of individual self-realisation and a bewildering number of newly discovered rights the rational individualism and the rational cognitive style that had been instrumental in the rise of capitalism and liberal democracy were radicalised and transformed almost beyond recognition. The growing general affluence that rapidly spread to all layers of society and the ever farther reaching arm of the state did the rest. While it was the genius of the bourgeois family to provide a balance between individualism and social responsibility, between individual 'liberation' and strong communal ties, between acquisitiveness and altruism, this fortuitous balance was torn asunder in the brief span of a few years during the 1960s and 70s.

A variety of demographic forces that revealed worrisome shifts in the structure of the family – such as the skyrocketing divorce rates, the unprecedented number of mothers joining the work force, increasing longevity, to name just a few – served a loosely joined coalition of Leftists and radical feminists to declare war on the family in its middle class form and ethos. Both family and ethos were declared to be no longer viable, nor were they held to be desirable. The governments of virtually every Western nation came under siege to establish, maintain, and, of course, finance supplementary and alternative structures to the family and to provide for a great variety of intervention mechanisms.

This is not the place to trace the sorry history of this cultural upheaval and its consequences (see Berger and Berger 1983, Ch 5). For our purposes suffice it to observe that today the majority of governmental efforts to supplement and circumvent the functions of the traditional family, with a few notable exceptions, have not achieved a whole lot. A mass of frightening statistics attests to their failure to stem the rising tide of delinquency, crime, drug use, teenage pregnancy and welfare dependency rampant in virtually every society of the West today. With the exception of Japan and, to a lesser degree, Korea and the overseas Chinese communities of Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore, the rise in social ills has been fairly consistent in all industrial societies, with the United States and the countries of Northern Europe outdistancing, by a

wide margin, countries such as France, Italy, Germany and the Czech Republic (Population Council 1995).

Upon closer inspection the research reveals that many public efforts have turned out to be not only wasteful of large sums of public moneys, but destructive of human lives as well. Instead of assisting individuals in their efforts to become integral parts of the modern economy, they have been instrumental in the creation of a growing dependency or 'underclass' that is today in danger of becoming a permanent fixture in the democratic capitalist societies of the West. All too often they have encouraged individuals to turn their backs on the traditional path to self-sufficiency and upward mobility that relied on the dynamic potential of families and the moral communities in which they are embedded - the churches, neighbourhood groups, self-help groups, and the many voluntary organisations typical of countries like the United States and Australia. If one views the politics of the past decades through the prism of the family, one cannot help but conclude that in turning away from the strong normative order of the middle class family all these costly public efforts combined to undermine the social fabric of Western civilisation.

Most recently, we have begun to witness the rediscovery of the salutary role of the family in the countries of the West. A sizeable portion of feminists, moved by the strength of their love for their children and, one would hope, their husbands as well, have been lured back from the wilder shores of madness where many had been moored for long. With the socialist vision discredited, perhaps beyond repair, policy makers already disheartened by the remarkable powerlessness of their programs, have also shown a surprising willingness to give credit to the importance of the family in the organisation of individual and social life. Yet despite pronounced shifts in the public mood, and a huge body of research available to support it, policy elites, by and large, appear neither inclined to put their trust into the nuclear middle class family, nor seem they have fully apprehended the degree to which its virtues and ethos continues to be indispensable for the maintenance of both the capitalist market and liberal democracy. And this observation takes me to the final point I wish to make today.

### **The Family and the Future of the Democratic Capitalist World**

As argued earlier, a large body of social science research documents

that public life lies at the mercy of private life. The linkage manifests itself most conspicuously in the area of socialisation and education. A wealth of data shows that a nuclear family of father, mother, and their children living together, mindful and actively involved with each other, are still a child's best guarantee for success in school as well as in life beyond. The same data also show that more than any other factor imaginable, an individual's progress continues to depend upon the traditional middle class virtues and practices their critics have taken great joy in bashing. The old adage that it does not matter what cards life has dealt you, but how you play them, is still as true today as it was a hundred years ago. Contrary to fashionable arguments, the evidence is in that the prudent use of traditional socialisation practices may still be the best service parents can render their children (Hirschi 1986), and the often brandished commitment of the middle class family to mould character traits of resilience, perseverance, to motivate their children to be responsible, trustworthy and self-reliant, remain traits uniquely suited to fortify them against the odds of life ahead.

It is remarkable that all through the war against the family level-headed middle class parents have always known the importance of middle class child rearing patterns. Despite an almost pathetic gullibility when it comes to the prospects of their children, their common sense has fortified these parents to resist the siren songs of elites who promised that paradise would be gained once the last remnants of the bourgeois world order was done away with. Unfortunately the poor and uninformed have neither had the knowledge nor the strength to do the same. While there can be little doubt that parents all over the world, regardless of nationality and social origin, have remained loyal to the time-tested values of the middle class ethos, the same cannot be said of the media and a generation of policy-makers reared in the adversary culture of the past decades. One can only hope that enough pressures will be marshalled to reverse this trend. Efforts like the CIS's program *Taking Children Seriously* are therefore of great importance to introduce a sense of reality into the public debate.

When one turns to the life of adults, large sets of data again document that the institution of marriage, despite all its problems and tedium, is still the best thing around. Both men and women are healthier, happier, more productive, and live longer when married. The bad news is that many are not aware of this linkage and there exists a

widespread suspicion among many today that the grass is greener on the other side of the fence. Yet despite considerable apprehensions, marriage appears to be as popular as ever, and although middle class couples have fewer children than before, they do have children, nonetheless. The desire for an exclusive sexual relationship is as strong, if not stronger, today as it was a hundred years ago, and if we are to trust the researchers of the recent *The Social Construction of Sexuality* (Lauman, Gagnon and Kolata 1994), there is much less philandering going on than sensationalist media reports have led us to believe. If couples divorce, it appears that both men and women spend an awful lot of time and effort in getting married again, thereby giving credence to Dr. Johnson's lapidary finding that remarriage constitutes the triumph of hope over experience.

And finally, in adding yet one more dimension to an already complicated future scenario, it should be self-evident for anyone who has eyes to see that the modern world with its sophisticated organisational structures and awesome technological capacities depends upon a large reservoir of people psychologically well-adjusted, educationally prepared, and socially competent to execute the kind of performances necessary to acquire and operate the instruments of the post-industrial systems. Whatever the future will bring, one thing is for sure, it will be a system of life in which the principal unit of action is based on individual performance. Despite the perennial search for community and the resting places for the soul, the mechanism of individualism remains the mechanism of a questing individual seeking more and better frontiers. Where such self-reliant, motivated, and yet ethically responsible individuals are to come from is then a question that poses itself with great urgency. There can be but one answer to this query. As I have tried to argue throughout my talk there exists a peculiar 'cognitive fit' between the requirements of a highly organised technological society and the individualistic familism of the middle classes, a cognitive fit that fosters habits and sentiments conducive to economic progress, to the formation of a sense of civic responsibility, and that has the capacity to instil a 'rational cognitive restlessness' in its individual members.

During the past century the industrial system has undergone numerous permutations that exacted social adjustments in the ways we work, where we live, how we live, what and how we consume and so forth. Regardless of such permutations, however, the social habits, the norms and the cognitive style peculiar to the middle class family remain

to this day the core features of any social order based on the principles of democratic capitalism. To put it differently, our type of civilisation, and by extension any democratic capitalist society – today as in the past, regardless of its provenance, permutations, or geographical location continues to be dependent upon the culture and ethos that defines the middle class family. Regardless of origin and history, any family system – be it now Chinese, Japanese, German, Indian, Islamic, African, and so forth – can meet the challenges of the future, as long as it contains the core features of the family system that was instrumental in the creation of the modern world.

A year or so ago, Samuel Huntington, the eminent political scientist at Harvard, caused a considerable stir with his proposition that world politics is moving into a period of ‘civilizational clash’ in which the primary identification of people around the world will not be ideological, as during the Cold War, but rather cultural (Huntington 1994). Now that Western style capitalism and democracy have remained triumphant, Huntington argued that conflict will arise not between fascism, socialism, and democracy, but between the world’s major cultural groups, Western, Islamic, Confucian, Hindu, and so on. Judging by the attention it caused, Huntington’s provocative essay ‘The Clash of Civilisations?’ clearly hit a central nerve in the minds of academics and politicians alike. While only time will tell whether and to what degree Huntington’s predictions are accurate, his essay performs the crucial service of bringing into focus the role factors of culture play in the affairs of nations. In contrast to Huntington, however, I would emphasise the singular importance of the family in the formation of civilisations. And this observation takes me back to the beginning of this talk. If such ‘a clash of civilisations’ should occur some time in the future, then this clash, at its roots, will be one between different family systems and the ways in which they are able to integrate the properties of human nature and human existence with the requirements of the post-modern world rushing towards us today. Any society that disregards this fundamental reality does so at its own peril.

## References

- Bascom, William 1968, 'The Urban African and his World' in Sylvia S. Fava (ed.), *Urbanism in World Perspective*, Thomas Y. Crowell, New York.
- Berger, Brigitte and Peter 1983, *The War Over the Family*, Basic Books, New York.
- Epstein, A.L. 1969, 'Urbanisation and Social Change in Africa' in Gerald Breese (ed.) *The City in Newly Developing Countries*, Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, N.Y.
- Himmelfarb, Gertrude 1994, *The De-moralization of Society: From Victorian Virtues to Modern Values*, Alfred A. Knopf, New York.
- Hirschi, Travis 1986, *Delinquency and Family Life*, Basic Books, New York.
- Huntington, Samuel 1994, 'The Clash of Civilisations?' *Foreign Affairs* 72(3): 22-49.
- Laslett, Peter 1965, *The World We Have Lost: England before the Industrial Revolution*, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York.
- Lauman, Edward v, John Gagnon and Gina Kolata 1994, *The Social Construction of Sexuality*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago.
- MacFarlane, Alan 1987, *The Culture of Capitalism*, Basil Blackwell, Cambridge.
- McKendrick, Neil 1974, 'Home Demand and Economic Growth: A New View of the Role of Women and Children in the Industrial Revolution' in Neil McKendrick (ed.), *Historical Perspectives: Studies in English Thought and Society in Honour of J.H.Plumb*, Europa Publications, London.
- Martin, David 1990, *Tongues of Fire*, Blackwell, Oxford.
- Medick, Hans 1975, 'The Proto-industrial Family Economy: The Structural Function of Household and Family During the Transition from Peasant Society to Industrial Capitalism' in Charles Tilly (ed.) *The Formation of National States in Western Europe*, Princeton University Press, Princeton N.J.
- Moodie, T. Dunbar 1994, *Going for Gold*, University of California Press, Berkeley.
- Mount, Ferdinand 1982, *The Subversive Family*, Jonathan Cape, London.
- Population Council 1995, *Special Report of the Population Council*, New York.
- Redding, S. Gordon 1990, *The Spirit of Chinese Capitalism*, Walter de Gruyter, Berlin and New York.
- Shorter, Edward 1975, *The Making of the Modern Family*, Basic Books, New York.
- Véliz, Claudio 1994, *The New World of the Gothic Fox*, University of California Press, Berkeley.
- Wong, Siŋ-lun 1985, 'The Chinese Family Firm: A Model', *The British Journal of Sociology* 26 (1): 58-72.

## Vote of Thanks

The Hon. Bob Carr

*Premier of New South Wales*

Well, why is a Labor Premier moving a vote of thanks to Professor Berger? I believe it is a fascinating revelation that Professor Berger and I are political soulmates. She told me tonight that in the local government elections of 1955 in Southern Bavaria she was the Social Democratic candidate for the mayoralty of a small village. She lost because the Communist candidate, in a total electoral enrolment of 200, mobilised all the votes of the old people's home, and did her like a dinner.

Far more importantly, however, Professor Berger's speech tonight dealt with the great challenge of what makes a successful society. We can reflect on our own society, Australia's 200 years, and the undoubted success that the Australian experiment has been. There are many attempts to explain the success of the 200 years of Western white settler society launched in 1788 on these shores. There has been Geoffrey Blainey's emphasis on the ingenuity of Australian farmers and miners. There are Manning Clark's theories on the influence of Protestant and Enlightenment ideas. There's the undoubted energy that derives from a culturally diverse migrant society. There are the English institutions which provided the framework of a parliament, a free press, a legal system and the rest. But it could well be tonight that we are able to apply a new insight in taking Professor Berger's notion of the bourgeois family as the cornerstone of a successful society.

In this notion we may in fact be provided with a more useful key than any of those I have mentioned to the success of Australia, in its little more than 200 years. A society based on a mix of qualities, such as private property, conjugal choice, and the other features that come with Professor Berger's definition of the bourgeois family, strikes me as explaining a great deal about the success of our society created as it was in the hopes of migrants, waves of migrants, beginning with the fragile experiment of 1788.

The other reason that I am interested in Professor Berger and her

views is that anyone in public life, from any side of public life, must focus today on the limitations of traditional welfare solutions. In the US the hopes of the Great Society have led to so many monumental disappointments. John Kaldor, who is here tonight, gave me a gift of Newt Gingrich's book. Gingrich gives an account of being taken by a black congressman into a Harlem school and the black congressman points out that one in four of the black males in this classroom will end up being dead or in jail in four years time. If anyone had told you in the 1960s that this would be the outcome a quarter of a century after Lyndon Johnson's Great Society experiment it would have been seen as proof positive of the failure of that approach.

Circumstances must force us to rethink many of those traditional welfarist approaches, not least because of the penetrating generalisations that Professor Berger has delivered. What she has shown us tonight in these insights is the persistence, indeed the permanence, of the family institution, that bourgeois family, that much derided, much despised bourgeois family. I believe her essential message, especially in the conclusion of her address tonight, is by no means one of pessimism but in the true liberal tradition, one of optimism. For that and for the illumination she has given us I thank her on your behalf, ladies and gentlemen, and most warmly and appreciatively on my own.



# Taking Children Seriously

In 1994 the Centre embarked on a program of research entitled *Taking Children Seriously*, directed by CIS Senior Fellow, Barry Maley. At the heart of the program is the present and future well-being of children. The Centre is concerned that due regard is not given to the notion that the child is the nucleus of tomorrow's society. The program, to be carried out over a period of at least three years, focuses on a number of important issues and their public policy implications for children, young adults and families. The program has already elicited and will continue to produce major publications and policy forums which deal with issues pertinent to the welfare of children, young adults and families.

## SOME SELECTED CIS PUBLICATIONS



### Shaping the Social Virtues

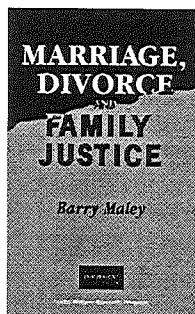
People value virtues such as cooperation, honesty, responsibility and kindness. Because social virtues are best learnt in childhood, the family is central to the effective teaching of virtuous attitudes and behaviour. The three essays collected in *Shaping the Social Virtues* all examine the institution of the family. This publication is a valuable introduction to the current controversy surrounding the family. It is also the first major publication of the CIS's *Taking Children Seriously* program.

[PM28]      A\$13.95      NZ\$18.95      ISBN 1 86432001 X  
(1994)      124pp.

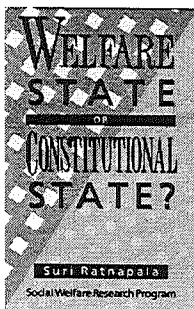
### Marriage, Divorce and Family Justice

Barry Maley discusses the principles that should guide reform of the Family Law Act 1975; one is to allow claims for compensation in the settlement of divorces. He also analyses the effect of misguided economic, labour market, welfare, taxation and child care policies on families.

'Current family policy not only denies equity, it handicaps the capacity of parents of intact families effectively to raise their children – by promising government support for separated parents, it provides an intended incentive for family break-up.'



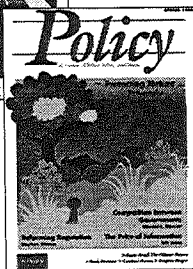
[PM25]      A\$14.95      NZ\$21.95      ISBN 0 949796 84 3  
(1993)      96pp.



### Welfare State or Constitutional State?

Dr Suri Ratnapala explains why the welfare state is a constant source of political conflict in Australia. Welfare policy is typically promoted by delegated legislation and administrative regulations that escape parliamentary scrutiny. He argues that only by restoring the constitutional distinction between legislation and administration can we have a welfare policy reflecting genuine points of agreement among the public.

[PM15]      A\$12.95      NZ\$18.95      ISBN 0 949769 54 1  
(1990)      116pp.



## Policy

*Policy* is the Centre's flagship journal. It is issued quarterly and provides regular, expert commentary on public affairs. It circulates to CIS supporters, schools and universities, government departments and the media. *Policy* articles are regularly excerpted or reported in daily newspapers and other print media.

It contains:

- articles on topics of current public concern;
- reviews of books likely to influence policy debate; and
- critical discussions of ideas and theories relevant to public policy.

The cost to subscribe to *Policy* is \$40 for 4 issues a year or \$20 for students.

## Order Form

If you wish to order any of the books mentioned please photocopy this page and return to the address below. For more information about other publications or CIS activities please use the form opposite.

CODE	QUANTITY	\$ PRICE	TOTAL

**Postage:** Please add 10% of your total order cost for postage and handling (min. \$1.00, max. \$4.00)

**Foreign Orders:** Please add 15% of your total order cost (max. \$10.00). Airmail costs additional. Cheques not in Australian dollars will incur a service fee of A\$10.00

SUB-TOTAL	
POSTAGE	
TOTAL	

### PAYMENT DETAILS

- My cheque, made payable to the Centre for Independent Studies, for \$\_\_\_\_\_ is enclosed, OR
- Charge \$\_\_\_\_\_ to my  Amex  Mastercard  Bankcard  Visa
- Card No. | \_ | \_ | \_ | \_ | \_ | \_ | \_ | \_ | \_ | \_ | \_ | \_ | \_ | \_ | \_ | \_ | \_ | \_ | \_ | \_ | Expiry Date: \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_
- Cardholder's Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Send this coupon to:

**THE CENTRE FOR INDEPENDENT STUDIES**  
**P.O. Box 92**  
**ST LEONARDS 2065 AUSTRALIA**  
 Ph: (02) 438 4377 Fax: (02) 439 7310